

# Original sources of evidence are crucial for an informed discussion

## Nestlé: using the evidence

### Dear Editor

In their letters in the August issue (vol 14(8), 2006, p. 493) Tracy Thode and Miranda Noble have missed the whole point of our original article. The purpose was to challenge midwives to form their own professional opinions based on good research, hard facts and up-to-date information rather than biased information taken from only one source, i.e. a pressure group website.

Midwives must not allow their own, personally held, prejudices to adversely affect their professional responsibility. Tracy and Miranda may not be midwives, in which case they have no professional responsibility.

The group who went to Switzerland were not young novices; we were all mature and very senior professionals. We were not beguiled by the big company image, rather we used the information we gained, along with a wealth of independent information, to form an opinion which will help us make measured and professional decisions in the future.

**Chris Sidgwick, Professional Advisor (Midwifery), Leamington Spa, Warwickshire**

### Dear Editor

Baby Milk Action finds the article 'The Nestlé issue from an evidence based midwifery perspective' contains errors and omissions. We encourage midwives to visit our website [www.babymilkaction.org](http://www.babymilkaction.org) for a full response, but would like to highlight some specific points below.

The authors say that the Nestlé boycott was rejected in 1989. It has been launched by groups in 20 countries and, according to a survey conducted by GMIPoll, Nestlé is one of the most boycotted companies on the planet. Baby Milk Action has singled Nestlé out for boycott action because: 'monitoring conducted by IBFAN (the International Baby Food Action Network) finds it to be responsible for more violations of the World Health Assembly marketing requirements for baby

foods than any other company.' The authors suggest our campaigning only targets Nestlé, yet we monitor all companies and expose malpractice. It is our materials the authors reference as evidence of malpractice by other companies. This includes the prosecution of Wyeth/SMA in the UK, where we brought the trial to public and media attention and our materials were used in the successful prosecution.

Regarding the 'Baby Killer' trial, the authors imply the claims in this 1974 booklet were false by stating: 'Nestlé sued and won but it damaged their public profile.' In reality Nestlé won only against the title 'Nestlé kills babies' on the technical grounds it was not guilty of premeditated killing. The campaigners were fined the token amount of 300 Swiss Francs each and the judge warned Nestlé to change its practices.

The article suggests that IBFAN refused to accept the consensus of a 1979 meeting convened by the World Health Organization and the United Nations Childrens Fund (UNICEF), which called for a marketing code. However, it was Nestlé Vice President, Ernest Saunders, who opposed adoption of the code, writing to the World Health Assembly (WHA): 'The World Industry has found this present draft code unacceptable.' Governments of both developing and industrialized countries spoke strongly in favour of the code and it was adopted despite industry protests by 118 votes with 1 against and 3 abstentions.

With regard to ongoing malpractice IBFAN presents examples of companies' own materials showing continued violation of the code and subsequent, relevant WHA resolutions. The authors did not critique this evidence, but dismissed it with the comment: 'reliance on Baby Milk Action alone is not professionally sound'. Why then no mention of the Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring, consisting of 27 church, academic and development organisations, which conducted monitoring independently and found 'systematic' violations by Nestlé and other companies? On our website we link to peer-reviewed studies in the *British Medical Journal*, including one based

on Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring's results.

The authors refer to GES, the only ethical investment organisation in the world to include Nestlé. GES refuses to consider monitoring evidence, instead looking at company reports. Reputable listings such as FTSE4Good exclude Nestlé, not least because its policies are not in line with the WHA code and resolutions.

The authors state: 'Nestlé have financial and education resources available which would improve services to women and, as a result of fact finding, we see no reason not to tap into those resources at a time when most Trusts and educational establishments have very limited funds available.' We encourage midwives to study WHA Resolutions 49.15 and 58.32 on conflicts of interests and article 21 of the UK Infant Formula and Follow-on Formula Regulations before bringing Nestlé produced or sponsored materials into health facilities. Linking its name to the health-care system is a favoured tactic of Nestlé worldwide. Parents have the right to independent information and pleading poverty is a poor reason for undermining this, particularly when India prohibits baby food company sponsorship of health professionals and Brazil bans company-sponsored education materials.

We believe that the authors have misrepresented information in their primary reference, a paper by Lisa Newton, a quote from an anthropologist is wrongly applied to World Health Organization and UNICEF, important information is excluded (such as the Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring and UNICEF criticisms of Nestlé) and information confused. The other major source of information is Nestlé. Its staff are commended for knowledge of the code, despite UNICEF's criticism of Nestlé's interpretation.

We see midwives as key partners and we hope they really will consider the evidence and join others around the world in taking action to protect infants and their families.

**Mike Brady, Campaigns and Networking Coordinator, Baby Milk Action**